



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
OFFICE OF STATE HUMAN RESOURCES  
1331 MAIL SERVICE CENTER • RALEIGH, NC 27699-1331

PAT MCCRORY  
GOVERNOR

C. NEAL ALEXANDER, JR.  
STATE HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTOR

### COPING TIPS FOR REMAINING EMPLOYEES

After the “good-byes” have been said to colleagues that will no longer be a part of the organization’s workforce, it is very difficult for remaining employees to return to a normal work routine. In fact, “normalcy” will need to be redefined once a reduction-in-force has occurred. The impact of the transition on the employees left behind is often overlooked and many may feel both lucky and guilty that they still have a job.

When long-term friends and colleagues have been removed from the workforce, a void is created in personal relationships and professional assistance. Work duties may increase for some and others may fear the threat of future reductions. It is important for the agency and individual workers to legitimize and recognize that a reduction-in-force is an emotional and psychological trauma.

Certain steps can be taken to help create a new sense of normalcy.

- The first step for any employee is to **take care of yourself**. While this may appear a strange suggestion, it is vital to be aware of your own needs and physical/emotional condition. The basics of proper eating and sleeping habits is crucial in times of stress, as well as exercise and taking time to enjoy the things that calm and relax you. While seeking ways to relax, be wary of habits that can lead to unhealthy means of “self-medication”. Then, allow others to care for you. Family and friends are there to support you and this is the time to allow that support. Ask them for what you need - a listening ear, a day fishing, or perhaps some quiet time at home.
- Allow for **grieving**. There may be strong push by others and perhaps by yourself to “get on with things” and start to address the new obstacles ahead. In fact, a sense of urgency to tackle the new challenges may be a way to avoid facing the loss of coworkers and community. But it is vital to recognize and adjust to the loss and change. It is not “hanging on to the past” to talk about old times or to keep mementos of former workers. It is an important part of airing the thoughts and feelings that many may be feeling. Don’t be afraid to talk about it at appropriate times.
- As with other types of tragic loss, there is often a cycle of such reactions that people will experience. Knowing that this is a normal expected reaction will make it less upsetting.

- Even with the expectation of the transition, there may still be an initial sense of **shock**. Certain behavior, such as calling the extension of someone who has left, may be a force of habit or a subconscious means of protecting yourself from the impact.
- It is also natural to feel a sense of **relief**, which will link with a strong sense of **guilt**. Why was it them and not you may be a recurring thought. You may feel compelled to do something for them, or to prove your worth to the agency.
- **Resentment** and **anger** is also to be expected. A need to know why this happened and disagreement about how certain decisions were made may impede any sense of commitment to the organization.
- **Worry** may also be over very real concerns. More work will be expected with fewer resources. Key people and services may be absent and the prospect of accomplishing core tasks may appear dim.
- It is important in any of these stages to recognize when it is lasting too long or is felt too severely. If your thoughts or behavior are drastically affecting your ability to do your work or carry on in your personal life, seek help. It is not a weakness of character or a defeat when a traumatic situation reaches a point at which you can no longer manage it yourself. Reaching out and finding support is a way of managing the issue.
- Finally, despite the reduced resources and the potential negative atmosphere, **opportunities** often occur during a restructuring. With job duties shifting, the very manner and means of your work is changing. You may have the best understanding of how projects may be completed and may be able to personally impact the new structure to maximize positive outcomes. In the confusion and uncertainty of trying things a new way, there is an opportunity to try a novel approach or to approach things from a different perspective.

Share new ideas with your colleagues and supervisors. You may provide the key to accomplishing more with less. Also, as you take on some of the duties and responsibilities of co-workers who were affected by the reduction-in-force, you will have the opportunity to gain new skills and broaden your capabilities.